



Massachusetts Department of Education

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**Bureau of Teacher Preparation,
Certification and Placement
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**A Guide
to Certification
in Massachusetts**

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A GUIDE TO CERTIFICATION IN MASSACHUSETTS

I. INTRODUCTION

Certification is a requirement for legal employment in the public schools of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Requiring certification assures that the public schools are staffed with professionals who meet a prescribed level of competency. School systems may also require qualifications over and above certification for particular positions.

The purpose of this handbook is to help applicants understand the routes to certification and the terms used in the certification process. Although it is written primarily for applicants, it may prove useful to school and college personnel. Individuals who have questions not answered in this handbook should write or call the Bureau of Teacher Preparation, Certification and Placement, Massachusetts Department of Education, 1385 Hancock Street, Quincy, MA 02169, (617) 770-7517.

II. REQUIREMENTS AND STANDARDS FOR CERTIFICATION

All programs leading to certification have three major *requirements*.*

1. A specific number of semester hours of course work in the field of specialization (Field of Knowledge*);
2. A specific number of semester hours of course work, including field-based experiences*, in instruction, educational administration or support services for the area in which certification is sought (Pre-Practicum*);
3. Supervised experience (Practicum*, Half Practicum* or Internship*).

All candidates must demonstrate that they meet the five *standards** (These standards differ for administrative, support, and teaching certificates.) For classroom teaching certificates, for example, the standards are:

1. Knowledge of the field of specialization (Standard I);
2. Ability to convey that knowledge clearly in speaking and writing (Standard II);
3. Ability to organize that knowledge into an effective curriculum (Standard III);
4. Ability to evaluate student learning (Standard IV);
5. Sensitivity to individual differences and learning styles (Standard V).

* See Definition of Terms

The three requirements and the five standards are closely related. The first requirement is designed to prepare candidates to meet the first standard. (For most candidates for initial teaching certificates, this usually means an undergraduate major in the teaching field.) The second requirement, the pre-practicum, is designed to prepare candidates to meet the second, third, fourth, and fifth standards. The third requirement, the practicum or internship, is designed to give candidates an opportunity to practice what they have learned in the pre-practicum and to demonstrate through actual classroom performance that they have in fact acquired all of the competencies of the five standards. This demonstration is at the heart of certification in Massachusetts, and it is why the Massachusetts system is sometimes called "competency based." The evaluation of actual performance against the standards is sometimes required even of experienced candidates.

For certain certificates, the candidate must also hold a prerequisite certificate* and/or have prerequisite experience*. For foreign language, bilingual and English as a Second Language certificates, a test is required.

Besides the basic academic requirements for certification, candidates must also meet certain non-academic, legal requirements. The candidate must submit:

1. a required fee;
2. proof of good health and sound moral character;
3. proof of possession of a bachelor's or higher earned degree; and
4. proof of U.S. citizenship.

A temporary certificate, valid for two years and renewable, will be issued to a candidate who has met all requirements except citizenship and who has submitted proof to the Bureau that a declaration of intention to become a citizen (Form N-315) has been filed with the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.

For bilingual certification proof of U.S. citizenship is not required. However, a candidate must submit proof of authorization to be legally employed.

Effective September 1, 1993 all candidates for certification will be required to possess a bachelor's degree with a liberal arts and sciences or interdisciplinary major. Requirements for certification are presently under review. In addition, subject to state funding, in future years candidates for an initial teaching certificate may be required to pass a standardized test in language and communication skills and in the teaching field.

III. ROUTES TO CERTIFICATION

A. Massachusetts Approved Program

The primary route to certification for those preparing in Massachusetts is through completion of a Massachusetts state-approved program*, of which there are several hundred in fifty-eight public and private colleges and universities throughout the Commonwealth. Approved programs are offered on both the graduate and undergraduate level, and for both initial certificates and additional certificates. Anyone who completes an approved program and meets the other requirements for certification will be granted a

* See Definition of Terms

Massachusetts certificate and will be eligible for the closest equivalent certificate in the thirty-plus states that have signed the Interstate Certification Compact (ICC). (See Section C, Interstate Reciprocity.)

While approved programs generally are designed to prepare candidates who are starting "from scratch," some colleges have sought and gained the right to assess the competencies of candidates with previous experience and accommodate their programs accordingly. As a rule, colleges will conduct such assessments only for candidates already enrolled in their programs.

The program approval process is based on the five standards and on certain institutional requirements in the Board of Education's Regulations for the Certification of Educational Personnel (603 CMR 7.03). Programs are re-evaluated at the end of each five year approval period.

A list of Massachusetts approved programs, updated annually, is available from the Bureau.

B. Massachusetts Registered Program

Some Massachusetts colleges and universities have programs which are registered with the Bureau, but not approved, or not yet approved. The Bureau has reviewed these programs on paper and concluded that a candidate who completes the whole program successfully, based on the standards will qualify for a certificate in Massachusetts. Such a program will not, however, generate an equivalent certificate in other ICC states until the candidate has been employed while certified for a total of three years of the past seven, at least two years of which are under the certificate sought. Individuals interested in out-of-state certification should contact the appropriate state in order to find out how they can best meet certification requirements for that state.

Approved programs are not necessarily better or worse than registered programs. Colleges often seek to register new programs, or programs with very small enrollments, instead of seeking full approval.

C. Interstate Reciprocity

Massachusetts has signed reciprocity agreements with 30 states for teaching certificates, with 12 for administrative certificates, and with 9 for support certificates. These agreements, which comprise the Interstate Certification Compact (ICC), are based on specific legislation in each state. They are binding therefore, and constitute guarantees of reciprocity. There are specific terms that states must meet before they may enter into the agreement.

Certification through reciprocity is not automatically granted. Certain conditions must be met. The conditions are different for administrative and non-administrative (teaching, support) certificates. For non-administrative certificates, the candidate must have either (1) completed a state-approved program; or (2) been employed while certified for three of the last seven years in the state that granted the certificate (two of these years need to be under the certificate sought). In other words, for non-administrative certificates, reciprocity applies immediately only to certificates earned through state-approved programs. Certificates earned by any other route are reciprocal only after the specified years of employment. For example, if an individual who was certified in Vermont (a reciprocal state) wants to be certified in Massachusetts as a high school biology teacher,

s/he must have either (1) completed a state-approved teacher preparation program in secondary biology; or (2) taught high school biology for two of the past seven years in Vermont and have taught a third year in secondary biology or any area s/he was certified in at the time. For administrative certificates, certification by reciprocity is available only after the specified years of employment.

Further, when states guarantee reciprocity, they do so only for their nearest equivalent certificate and they reserve the right to impose certain non-academic requirements (tests, citizenship requirements, or health certificates), as well as prerequisite certificate and/or prerequisite experience requirements, on otherwise eligible candidates.

A list of "Reciprocal States" is available from the Bureau.

D. Transcript Evaluation

Individual candidates for certification who have not completed an approved or registered program, or who do not qualify for interstate reciprocity, may apply for an individual transcript evaluation. Until 1982, this was the primary route to certification in Massachusetts, and is the process most people think of when they think of certification. The Board of Education decided to maintain the option of transcript evaluation, so as not to exclude from the profession candidates from colleges without approved programs, candidates from non-reciprocal states, and candidates who did not decide on a career in public school education until well into their adult lives.

Transcript evaluation relies on counting courses on a transcript, but the current regulations define competencies, not courses. The Bureau staff therefore must ascertain what competencies were addressed in which courses, and this process often involves several exchanges of letters between the Bureau, the candidate and the college. Almost all candidates who apply for their initial certificates by this route, even the most experienced, will find that they must complete at least a full practicum, a half practicum, or an internship. This is because the Massachusetts regulations require demonstration of successful performance based on the standards.

Transcript evaluation is an appropriate route for some additional certificates (in a new field, at the same level; or a new level in the same field, for example) and for candidates who have completed substantial preparatory programs in other states which do not have reciprocity agreements with Massachusetts. For some candidates for additional certificates, such as an English teacher who wants a social studies certificate, or for some candidates with unorthodox preparation - a course here, a course there, some experience - transcript evaluation may be the best route.

IV. ALTERNATIVE ROUTES TO CERTIFICATION

A. Apprentice Teacher

This route to certification was established by the Massachusetts legislature in 1985 and implemented in 1987. It consists of an individualized preparatory program which allows a candidate who meets the subject matter (field of knowledge) requirement to teach as an apprentice for two full years or the equivalent while earning her/his certificate. This route is designed, for example, for a history major who decides to earn a certificate after

graduating, but did not want to enroll immediately in a full-scale approved preparatory program; or for an English major ten years out of college who decides to change careers; or for a private or parochial school teacher who now wants a public school classroom teaching certificate.

Apprentice Teachers must meet the same requirements as all other candidates, but are allowed to do so while employed. They must first apply to the Bureau, which will ascertain whether or not they meet the field of knowledge (Standard I) requirement. If qualified, they then may seek employment as apprentice teachers. The school district that hires the apprentice teacher files a plan for approval by the Bureau. This outlines the candidate's plan of preparation for certification and is sometimes developed in conjunction with a college. Once the terms of this plan have been met, including the positive evaluation of the candidate's performance, the Bureau will issue a certificate.

A brochure on the Apprentice Teacher Program and application form are available from the Bureau.

B. Certification Review Panel

On the recommendation of the Bureau, a candidate for certification may apply for review by the Certification Review Panel. This procedure, adopted by the Board of Education in August 1987, is designed for those candidates who appear to meet the standards through formal education and at least five years full-time or the equivalent part-time relevant professional experience, even though they may never have completed a program preparing them for the profession. Candidates will be approved by the Review Panel only if they can demonstrate that they do in fact substantially meet the competencies defined in the standards.

The Review Panel is not an appeals board. Instead, it is an alternative route to certification for highly qualified individuals who meet the standards through both their experience and their formal education, but who do not necessarily hold prerequisite certificates or meet all of the specific certification requirements.

The Review Panel provides flexibility in the certification of individuals who have not followed the conventional route of preparation, while adhering to the high standards for competency spelled out in the state regulations.

A fact sheet explaining the Certification Review Panel process is available from the Bureau.

V. INTERNSHIPS

Massachusetts regulations require an evaluation of on-the-job performance. Some individuals who have not completed Massachusetts approved or registered programs or who do not qualify for certification under reciprocity are required to complete at least either a half practicum or full internship. A half practicum is 150 clock hours of, supervised practice for college credit in the role and at the level covered by the certificate sought. In comparison, an internship is longer (300 clock hours) and allows an individual to be employed and paid while in the role and at the level for which certification is sought.

An internship may be either college sponsored or locally sponsored. In college sponsored internships, supervision and evaluation are the responsibility of the college or university

and college credit is earned. In locally sponsored internships, a school system must be authorized by the Bureau before the internship can begin, and is responsible for supervision and evaluation.

Before a locally sponsored internship may be undertaken, several requirements must be met: (1) the school system must be approved by the Bureau as an internship site; (2) the intern must be pre-registered with the Bureau and have completed most of the requirements for certification, including one-half of the practicum (for those certificates that require a full practicum). The registration process is initiated by the school system and must be completed before the candidate starts the internship. The intern must receive an authorized internship approval form before the internship can begin. After the internship is completed, the candidate must submit to the Bureau a completed internship report form validating that s/he has successfully demonstrated the five standards.

Information on the internship program is available from the Bureau.

VI. WAIVERS

When a school committee, after a *bona fide* effort, has not been able to fill a position with a candidate who is certified and qualified, it may apply to the Bureau for a waiver of the section of the law that requires employment of certified personnel only. Before the waiver request can be considered, a candidate must apply to the Bureau for the appropriate certificate. If the waiver is granted, the school committee may employ an uncertified candidate for the school year in question. In order for a waiver renewal to be considered, a candidate must make substantial progress toward earning that certificate.

Note that waivers are issued to school committees, not candidates. Waivers are not available to individual candidates. A waiver does not exempt a candidate from certification requirements. It exempts employers (school committees), for one year, from the clause in the law that requires schools to employ only certified candidates.

Waiver request forms are available to school systems from the Bureau.

ROUTES TO CERTIFICATION

ROUTE	YOU MAY APPLY IF YOU HAVE:	DOCUMENTATION NEEDED (IN ADDITION TO INITIAL APPLICATION MATERIALS)	OUTCOME
1. Massachusetts Approved Program	completed a Massachusetts state-approved program	a statement on transcript or a letter from college validating completion of a state-approved program 1 a completed Massachusetts practicum or internship report 2 official transcript(s) 3	certification
2. Massachusetts Registered Program	completed a Massachusetts program that has been registered with the Bureau	a completed Massachusetts practicum or internship report 2 official transcript(s) 3	certification
3. Interstate Reciprocity:	Preparation and/or experience in a state with which Massachusetts has signed the reciprocity agreement (A list of reciprocal states is included with application materials.)		
a. Approved Programs in Other States (Not available for administrative certificates)	preparation in a state with which Massachusetts has signed the reciprocity agreement <u>and</u> have completed an approved program in that state	a statement on transcript or a letter from college validating completion of a state-approved program 1 official transcript(s) 3	certification
b. Experienced Educator	three years of experience, while certified, in the last seven (two of which must be in the area and at the level of the certificate sought) in a state with which Massachusetts has signed the reciprocity agreement	an experience letter signed by the superintendent(s) on official school letterhead validating three years of experience in the last seven and specifying the area and the level of the experience; <u>and</u> proof of certification [copy of certificate(s)] while employed. official transcript(s) 3	certification
4. Transcript Evaluation	a) completed a substantial preparatory program in a non-reciprocal state in the area in which certification is sought b) are seeking an additional certificate, but have not completed a state-approved or registered program for that certificate c) completed little or no education course work and would like specific recommendation on what is needed for certification	official transcript(s) 3 official transcript(s) 3 official transcript(s) 3	need to complete at least a half practicum or full internship depends on level and area of certificate sought depends on previous course work

To avoid commonly made errors, documents should be checked to assure that these specifications are met:

- 1 **Statement on transcript or a letter validating completion of state-approved program** - must indicate that the program is state-approved for a specific field and at a specific grade level. The letter must be on official school letterhead and signed by the registrar or dean.
- 2 **Practicum or Internship Report** - must specifically state whether or not an individual has met the five standards for certification in Massachusetts and the number of clock hours of the practicum or internship.
- 3 **Official Transcript** - must have registrar's signature clearly visible on the transcript.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Requirements are the academic and related components a candidate must complete. While meeting the standards and associated competencies, the candidate for certification must obtain a certain number of semester hours of course work in the areas defined by the standards, complete a practicum or internship and in some cases hold a prerequisite certificate or have prior employment under or in the role of the certificate. These are all "requirements" for certification. A candidate for a social studies teaching certificate, for example, must complete 36 semester hours in social studies course work as defined in Standard I (Field of Knowledge), 21 semester hours in courses and field-based experiences as defined in Standards II-V (Pre-Practicum), and complete a practicum judged successful on the basis of Standards I-V.

Standards are the regulations which define the knowledge required in the role sought for certification. The standards cover five general areas: Standard I - Knowledge of the Field, Standard II - Communication, Standard III - Curriculum/Program Design and Implementation, Standard IV - Evaluation, and Standard V - Equitability/Sensitivity to Individuals.

Competencies relate to the individual's performance in the five areas of knowledge listed under "Standards". Standard II for classroom teachers, for example, states that, "the effective teacher communicates clearly, understandably, and appropriately." To meet this standard, the candidate will demonstrate specific competencies such as, "gives clear and concise explanations and directions."

Field of Knowledge refers to Standard I and is a discipline, major, or interdisciplinary concentration in which a candidate for certification is expected to be knowledgeable. For example, a history teacher must complete course work in history and methods of historical research.

Pre-Practicum are the courses and other experiences which, together with the courses in the field of knowledge, prepare the candidate to meet the standards.

Field-Based Experiences are the field-training component of the pre-practicum requirement. Three of the pre-practicum courses or the equivalent must include substantial field-based training related to the role covered by the certificate sought. These three courses must be completed before the practicum can begin.

Practicum is supervised practice in the role and at the level of the certificate sought. It must be full-time for one semester or half-time for two semesters, and include at least 300 clock hours at the practicum sites. In the case of a teacher, it is commonly referred to as student teaching, and an individual works under the supervision of the cooperating professional. Three field-based experiences must be completed before the practicum can be started. Depending on the area of certification sought or prior experience, an individual may be required to complete a full practicum, or to choose between completing a half practicum and a full internship (For a more detailed description of practicum requirements, see Regulations for the Certification of Educational Personnel available from the Bureau.)

Half Practicum is 150 clock hours of supervised practice for college credit in the role and at the level covered by the certificate sought.

Internship must be less than full-time, but at least one-fifth time, employment in the role and at the level of the certificate sought. A full internship (300 clock hours) is accepted in lieu of a half practicum (150 clock hours). (For a more detailed description of internship requirements, see Regulations for the Certification of Educational Personnel available from the Bureau.)

Prerequisite Certificate and/or Prerequisite Experience is a requirement that a candidate hold a specific certificate or have had specific employment under or in the role of a certificate before certification can be granted. This is required for specific certificate areas in addition to the other requirements for certification. For example, in order to be certified as a consulting teacher of reading, an individual must have a classroom teaching certificate and one year of employment in the role governed by that certificate, in addition to meeting the certificate requirements.

State-Approved Programs are preparation programs for educational personnel at colleges and universities which have been examined and approved by a review team under the direction of the state agency responsible for teacher preparation and certification.

**RESOURCE MATERIALS AVAILABLE FROM
THE BUREAU OF TEACHER PREPARATION,
CERTIFICATION AND PLACEMENT**

1. **Applying for Certification in Massachusetts:** explains the application process and lists the documents needed for certification through the various routes. This information is given to all individuals requesting an application for certification.
2. **Apprentice Teacher Brochure:** answers commonly asked questions about the Apprentice Teacher program and explains the eligibility requirements.
3. **Certification and Waivers for Teachers of Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) in Massachusetts (forthcoming):** provides information for bilingual teachers which includes certification procedures and the waiver process.
4. **Certification Review Panel Fact Sheet:** includes information on the eligibility guidelines and procedures for certification through the review panel.
5. **Internship Guidelines (forthcoming):** outlines step-by-step procedures and eligibility requirements for interns and school systems interested in this program.
6. **Massachusetts State-Approved Programs:** A list of college and university state-approved programs.
7. **Reciprocal States:** a list of states with which Massachusetts has signed reciprocity agreements.
8. **Regulations for the Certification of Educational Personnel:** states the Board of Education's regulations for the certification of educational personnel, including the standards and requirements for all certificates. Extracts of the regulations are also available for specific certificates.

